

**IT IS WIDELY BELIEVED** that George Puttenham is the author of a beautiful work entitled *The Arte of English Poesie*; a work contained on the Authorship Controversy list to which is attributed to have been written by Sir Francis Bacon.

We recognize that Puttenham is first mentioned as a writer upon English verse by Richard Carew (Sir Anthony, Esq):

“To close up these proofs of our copiousness, look into our limitations of all sorts of verses afforded by any another language, and you shall find that Sir Philip Sidney, Master Puttenham, Master Stanihurst, and divers more have made use how far we are within compass of a fore imagined possibility in that behalf.”



Sir Francis Bacon, St. Albans  
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The comment is from an Essay entitled *On the Excellency of the English Tongue* found in Camden's *Remains* that was published in 1623 but did not appear in the first edition of 1605. At that period, Camden was not acquainted with Puttenham's name, because under the head of Poems, he writes only of “the Gentleman which proved that poets were the first Politicians, the first Philosophers, the first Historiographers.”

In a 1691 edition,<sup>1</sup> *The Arte of English Poesie* is mentioned again: “There is a book in being called *The Art of English Poese*, not written by Sidney, as some have thought, but rather by one Puttenham, sometimes a gentleman pensioner to Queen Elizabeth,” though Ballard<sup>2</sup> has said the work to have been attributed to Sir Philip Sidney.

On a short investigation done for George Puttenham, the following facts were discovered:

1. In the Prerogative Court of Canterbury is the Will & Testament regarding one George Puttenham, of London, Esq; dated September 1, 1590. There resides another Will & Testament with a name of Richard Puttenham, Esq., that concurs with the above as a scrivener's form; this is dated October 16, 1597 stating: “he being prisoner in her Majesty's Bench: bequeaths all his property to his verily reported and reputed daughter Katherine Puttenham.”<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Ath. Oian. 1691. Vol. I., Col. 184.

<sup>2</sup> *Memoirs of Learned Ladies*, P. 226 (1753).

<sup>3</sup> That the Christian name of Puttenham was George is confirmed by a manuscript of an unpublished work in prose, written by him, and preserved in the Harleian Collection. Its general character is amply shown by the following long title: “An Apologie or true defence of her Majesty's honour and good renown against all such as have unduly sought or shall seek to blemish the same with any injustice, cruelty, or other unprincely behaviour in any part of her Majesty's proceedings against the late Scottish Queen be it for her first surprince, imprisonment, process, attainder, or death. By very firm reasons, authorities and examples proving that her Majesty hath done nothing in the said action or otherwise, not warrantable by the law of God and of man. Written by George Puttenham to the service of her Majesty and for large satisfaction of all such persons both Princely and private who by ignorance of the case, or partial 'tis of mind shall happen to be irresolute and not well satisfied in the said cause.”

2. The time of Puttenham's birth, an observation from himself, enables us to place it between the years 1529 and 1535. Neither any branch of his family, nor himself, though a professed Courtier, appear to have either inherited or obtained any patrician badge of honour, though, from his liberal education, his parents must have moved in a noble circle.
3. Puttenham was an Oxford scholar, yet of what College and for how long he resided, or whether he obtained a degree, remains difficult to discover.
4. Puttenham's career at Court might have begun at the early age of eighteen, when he sought to gain the attention of the youthful King Edward VI., by writing an Eclogue entitled *Elpine*. He made one or more tours to the continent and proved himself neither an idle nor inattentive observer.
5. Puttenham visited successively the Courts of France, Spain, and Italy, and was at the Spa nearly about the year 1570. It is not improbable that he had a diplomatic appointment under Henry, the Earl of Arundel who was an old Courtier with the Queen's licence visiting Italy at the time; as he describes himself "a beholder of the feast given by the Duchess of Parma, to that nobleman, at the Court of Brussels".
6. Puttenham's return from abroad might be early after the above period, as appears by his report of visiting Sir Nicholas Bacon, the Lord Chancellor at the time, when seated in a gallery reading Quintilian, and talks of the eulogy on the speeches of Nicholas Bacon and one of his successors in the Courts of law.
7. From Puttenham's numerous verses addressed to Queen Elizabeth, before the time of the publication of *The Arte of English Poesie*, he must have been a Courtier, and was then "one of her gentlemen pensioners."<sup>4</sup>
8. We also found a curious tidbit worth adding, that among the persons who presented a new year's gift to Elizabeth in 1561, occurs the name of a George Webster who was the master cook. Here is the short entrance of that gift: "For a marchepane, being a chessboard had in return, one guilt tankerd, per oz. 8oz." It has been noted by Nichols<sup>5</sup> that Puttenham was also known or called by the name of Webster, but whether this master cook was Puttenham, we could not ascertain.

Investigating the literature archives, we discovered that of all Puttenham's numerous pieces, only *The Art of English Poesie* and *The Partheniades* are known to exist. It seems unaccountable that not a single poem by this author found a place in those miscellaneous and fashionable repositories called *Paradise of Dainty Devices*, or as commonly known, *England's Helicon*.

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<sup>4</sup> (a) Ellis. *Specimens of Early English Poets*, Vol. II., P. 164 (b) Joseph Haslewood. *Art of Ancient Critical Essays*, Vol. I., 1811.

<sup>5</sup> John Nichols. *The Progresses*, Vol. III. P. 19.

Although like many notable gentlemen in the Court of those days, who having written commendable pieces and suppressed them, or else would have suffered the consequences, we believe Puttenham might have followed such an anonymous trail of his other works, if he did in fact contribute more works. Still, those pieces we know of might have been expected to have left a more distinguished trace behind them.

Sir John Harrington, who bowed in the crowd around the throne, and was associated with the learned, describes Puttenham as ‘unknown,’ and calls him ‘Ignoto’. Harrington could only mention Puttenham’s works amongst the large amount of verses and other pieces that existed, concluding in his opinion, that the author was a poet. We offer the comment from Harrington’s *An Apologie of Poetrie* prefixed to the translation of Orlando Furioso (1591):

“Neither do I suppose it to be greatly behoo[ve] full for this purpose, to trouble you with the curious definitions of a poet and poesie, and with the subtle distinctions of their sundry kinds; nor to dispute how high and supernatural the name of a Maker is, so christened in English by that unknown godfather, that this last year save one, 1589, set forth a book called the *Art of English Poetrie*: and least of all do I purpose to bestow any long time to argue, whether Plato, Zenophon, and Erasmus, writing fictions and dialogues in prose, may justly be called poets, or whether Lucan writing a story in verse be an historiographer, or whether Master Faire translating Virgil, Master Golding translating Quid’s *Metamorphosis*, and myself in this work that you see, be any more then versifiers, as the same Ignoto termeth all translators: for as for all, or the most part of such questions, I will refer you to Sir Philip Sidney’s *Apologie*, who doth handle them right learnedly, or to the fore-named treatise, where they are discoursed more largely, and where, as it were a whole receipt of poetry is prescribed, with so manic new named figures, as would put me in great hope, in this age to come, would breed many excellent poets; sane for one observation that I gather out of the very same book.”

Another author, Oldys, tells us that “Puttenham was a visible Courtier; had been a traveller, and seen the Courts of foreign Princes; wherefore his illustration, both historical and political, are drawn so familiarly from thence, that he may be called the Court-critic of that Reign.”

Coming toward the end of our investigation of Puttenham, we may conclude that the work attributed to Puttenham was written with the intention that it should be dedicated to Queen Elizabeth, but there was a change in plans, and Burghley’s <sup>6</sup> name was substituted. <sup>7</sup> *The Art of English Poesie* has ever formed one of the scarce works of the Elizabethan times, and we will add Begley’s <sup>8</sup> research on this subject which is interesting:

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<sup>6</sup> (b.1520-d.1598).

<sup>7</sup> William T. Smedley. *The Mystery of Francis Bacon*, 1912: “When Francis Bacon in 1591 is threatening to become ‘a sorry bookmaker,’ he describes Burghley as the second founder of his poor estate, and uses the expression, ‘If your Lordship will not carry me on,’ which can only mean that as to the matter which is the subject of the letter, Burghley had not merely been assisting but carrying him.”

<sup>8</sup> *Bacon’s Nova Resuscitatio*, Vol. I., 1905.

“George Puttenham’s *Arte of English Poesie* is one of the most celebrated treatises on poetry that have been handed down to us from Elizabethan times. It is in many respects superior to the other books on the same subject by Sir Philip Sidney, Webbe, and other contemporaries. ‘In this work,’ says Hallam, who was a competent judge, ‘we find an approach to the higher province of philosophical criticism.’ But critics have found the greatest difficulty in settling the point of authorship; for the book was published anonymously in 1589, and the printer, Richard Field, confessed that he was ignorant of the author’s name, when he dedicated it to Lord Burghley. From internal evidence, the author clearly intended it at one time to be dedicated to Queen Elizabeth, and no reason is given why Lord Burghley took the Queen’s place. Whatever the secret was, it was extremely well kept, and Sir John Harington, only two years after its first appearance, was unable to ascertain who had written it. A little later on, in 1605, Camden in his *Remaines concerning Britaine*, refers to the work, but apparently could not or would not name the author.”



Francis Bacon at Gray’s Inn

We shall now try to connect Francis Bacon to the book in question that was printed by a printer called Richard Field, who a few years later printed the infamous Shakespearean poem *Venus and Adonis*.

*The Arte of English Poesie* being anonymous, the printer Field, speaks for it in an address to Burghley giving us some hint that the author is plainly a man of good birth and Court connections, who takes the highest interest in poetry, is a critic of a high philosophical kind, and by no means a bad poet himself.

In answer to this, we have Sir Thomas Bodley’s evidence that Francis Bacon wasted considerable time in his youth over poetry and ‘toys’ of invention, Bacon does not seem an unlikely person to make this valuable exposition of the ‘arte’ he was devoted to.

*The Arte of English Poesie* is extremely ‘methodical’ and well arranged. Bacon was most methodical, and was fond of illustrating his arguments by short tales and instances derived from his extensive reading and retentive memory. *The Arte of English Poesie* has many examples of this very kind of nature, and many of the tales and incidents have reference to the French Court gossip, such as Bacon would have been likely to hear when he was in attendance on Sir Amyas Paulet in France between 1576 and 1579.

We find no space to quote many instances at length to show similarities, but prefer to offer some brief notes to the pages of the book to show the likeness.

The Printer's Dedication.

To begin with, this printer's dedication seems to be written, not by Field nor by the author of *Partheniades*. We say this because the word 'scypher' is used in the dedication and in the last poem of *Partheniades* in a very unusual sense; the inference is that both were written by the same man. Yet Field did not write *Partheniades*, therefore Field probably did not write the dedication, but had it supplied to him. We are met with a Baconian device at the very beginning of the work.

Page 7.

There is a reference to 'marchants and travellers affirming that the American, the Perusine and the very Canniball do sing, and also say, their highest and holiest matters in certain riming versicles.' Bacon's interest in the New World is well known, and he mentions Peru several times in his authenticated works, especially in his *New Atlantis*.

Page 14.

Here we are told that the poet's phantasm may be 'so passing clear, that by it as by a glass or mirror, are represented unto the soul all merrier of beautiful visions.' And this is a thoroughly Baconian idea, as all who are acquainted with Bacon's philosophic views will admit without any objection.



Marguerite de Valois

Page 16.

Puttenham complains of that 'notable Gentlemen in the Court' and seemed to think it 'a discredit for a Gentleman to seem learned, and to show himself amorous of any good Art.' He adds: 'In other ages it was not so, for we read that Kings and Princes have written great volumes and published them under their own regal titles, as to begin with Salomon the wisest of Kings, Julius Caesar the greatest of Emperors, Hermes Trismegistus the holiest of Priests and Prophets.' Puttenham cites many more, and among them one 'Lady Margaret of France Queen of Navarre in our time.' We know that Bacon was connected with the Navarre family and the Medici family on his travels to France.

Page 22–23.

We have two whole pages taken up with remarks about heathen mythology, which are singularly consonant with Bacon's views in his well-known work entitled *Wisdom of the Ancients* [*De Sapientia Veterum*.] Moreover, Puttenham ends by referring to 'our books of lerotekni,' where the matter is treated more at large. The 'books of lerotekni,' unfortunately, are not extant. What if the manuscripts containing them furnished Bacon with what he wished



the world to know in his *Wisdom of the Ancients*, and were, in fact, his first sketch of the subject?

Page 37.

The author refers to 'our Triumphals, written in honour of her Majesty's long peace.' Bacon was a fine arranger and composer of such Courtly pieces.

Page 37–39.

The whole of this Chapter XXIV., is written in a style very similar to that used in Bacon's Essays.

Page 49.

'He wrate' is used for 'He wrote.' This occurs several times in Puttenham's book. 'I wrate' is an archaic usage, but it can be found from Spedding that Bacon also uses it in his letters.

Page 69.

Here there are some excellent remarks on the common Elizabethan street-singers and blind harpers that used to attract boys and country fellows by getting up 'upon benches and barrels heads' to sing their popular stories of old time. Puttenham gives them the name of 'Cantabanquit' and adds some of their romantic and historical themes. For instance he gives 'the tale of Sir Topas, the reports of Bevis of Southampton, Guy of Warwick, Adam Bell, and Clymme of the Clough.' According to a work by Anders on *Shakespeare's Books*,<sup>9</sup> Shakespeare was well acquainted with these popular tales, and passages are quoted from the plays: *Twelfth Night*, *King Lear*, *Henry VIII.*, and *Henry VI.*, to show that Shakespeare knew well a person called Bevis of Southampton, a person called Guy of Warwick, and a person called Topas.

It should not be inferred from this that Puttenham and Shakespeare are one, but only that Puttenham as well as the author of the Shakespeare plays were acquainted with these heroes of popular minstrels. This goes towards the balance on the Baconian side, if it could be shown that Puttenham knew nothing about these popular heroes, it certainly would weigh against his authorship of *The Arte of English Poesie*.

Page 75.

Here we have the strange account of the author 'being in Italy conversant with a certain gentleman' who told him all about the shaped verses of the Tartars, the Chinese and the Persians. This is certainly puzzling, for very little was known about Tartar literature, and perhaps the author intended to puzzle us and throw us off the track after his identity. But if Bacon went to Italy (and it seems that he did), he would hear more there about Tartar Cans and Eastern Poetry (at Venice especially) than in England, Spain or France; for the knowledge of Chams and Sultans in Elizabethan times was chiefly derived from Italian authors.

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<sup>9</sup> PP. 160-162.

Nashe had referred to Gabriel Harvey as a writer of shaped verses. Bacon and Harvey were contemporaries at Cambridge, and there is every reason to state that young Bacon would know about Harvey and his doings, Harvey being somewhat of an academic luminary at that time, and given to both Italian literature and discussions on English poetry.

Puttenham or Bacon had these shaped verses brought to his notice originally by Harvey. Such verses were by no means common, and were only written in congratulations on weddings. Cambridge could however, boast of others besides Harvey. There was Willes the traveller, who printed some works as early as 1575. Harvey mentions him, and probably knew him personally. He was a Fellow of Peterhouse, once Professor at Perugia.

Page 115.

This chapter tells about ornaments for public speeches. Spedding, in 1848, found a private memorandum by Bacon in his work entitled *Commentarius solutes*: 'To forward my L. of S. with ornaments for public speeches.' L. of S. means Lord of Suffolk, as Spedding supposed.

Page 116.

Here are long and interesting notices of the Lord Keeper, Sir Nicholas Bacon, the father of Francis. These notices betoken a very private moment with Sir Nicholas in his gallery alone and at home. Succeeding remarks show the author to be well acquainted with the inside of law-courts, and it appears that the author was a lawyer and pleader himself.

Page 120.

Three pages have much on the subject of language which is very Baconian. The author deals with the admission of new and foreign words into the general vocabulary, and defends many which he admits he has introduced in the present treatise, being a custom or fault of his, which he is 'not unwilling to acknowledge.'

Page 171.

We have a translation from the Greek anthology of that very epigram which Bacon also translated freely in his best authenticated poem that begins with 'The world's a bubble'. We offer it here for continuity purposes:

**Humane Life Characterized:  
By the Right Noble Peer, Francis Viscount St Albans,  
Late High Chancellor of England<sup>10</sup>**

The world's a bubble: and the life of man  
Less than a span;  
In his conception wretched, from the womb,  
So to the tomb:  
Curst from his cradle, and brought up to years,  
With cares and fears.

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<sup>10</sup> Jo. Silvester. *Panthea or Divine Wishes & Meditation*, 1630.

Who then to frail mortality shall trust,  
But limns the water, or but writes in dust.  
Yet, since with sorrow here we live oppressed,  
What life is best?  
Courts are but only superficial schools  
To dandle fools.  
The rural parts are turn'd into a den  
Of savage men.  
And where's the city from all vice so free,  
But may be term'd the worst of all the three?  
Domestic cares afflict the husband's bed,  
Or pains his head.  
Those that live single, take it for a curse,  
Or do things worse.  
Some would have children; those that have them moan,  
Or wish them gone.  
What is it then to have or have no wife,  
But single thralldom, or a double strife?  
Our own affections still at home to please  
Is a disease:  
To cross the sea to any foreign soil  
Perils and toil.  
Wars with their noise affright us: when they cease,  
We are worse in peace.  
What then remains, but that we still should cry  
Not to be born, or being born to die.

It was Farnaby, the famous schoolmaster, who attributed the above poem to Bacon as early as 1629, or about two years after its author's death, and Farnaby's authority is flawless. He would be a most unlikely man to make such a statement without good grounds it being the truth. Moreover, Farnaby was so interested in the poem that he translated the whole of it into Greek, and it was the only English poem admitted into his book.

Page 175.

The author says: 'When I was a scholar at Oxford they called every such one *Johannes ad oppositum*.' Bacon has jotted down a notice of *Jo. ad oppositum* in his *Letter and Discourse to Sir Henry Savile*. Moreover, this Johannes was not a gentleman generally known in society, except that he had gone through the University curriculum, and no record can be found of the Puttenham at any University. But Bacon was well acquainted with the academic functions and ceremonies of both Trinity and Oxford University.

Page 188.

Puttenham quotes a famous ditty made by Sir Philip Sidney that begins: 'My true love hath my heart, and I have his.' But the version here given by Puttenham differs from that which Sidney



originally composed, and Palgrave, in his remarks on this noted ditty, says that it had been altered by Sidney himself before it was quoted here.

Page 188.

Here we have a pseudo-prophecy of Chaucer quoted and ending: 'Then shall the Realm of Albion be brought to great confusion.' But according to Skeat's *Chaucer*,<sup>11</sup> and to Stow's<sup>12</sup> edition published in 1561, the prophecy was worded differently: 'Then shall the lond of Albion.' It seems that the author, following a practice peculiarly his own, has altered or improved upon the original line, and substituted 'Realm' for 'lond.' This type of word re-arrangement was a habit of Bacon's.

Page 193.

A good tale of 'Paulet Lord Treasurer of England and first Marquis of Worcester' is noted here. Bacon was in the train of Sir Amyas Paulet for some years in France.

Pages 201-206.

Here is by far the longest exposition in the whole book of *Poetical Ornament*,<sup>13</sup> and this third book comprises more than half of the whole treatise. The author, whoever he was, attached considerable importance to the subject of these pages. But what was the subject? It was none other than that of *Poetical Similitudes and Resemblances*, and these were the very subjects that Bacon plumed himself upon, as a man with a natural gift for the easy and appropriate use of such literary devices in a measure beyond that of other men.

Page 206.

On this page is some advice given to Queen Elizabeth as to the best way to treat the Dutch; and offering the Queen advice, is rather Baconian.

Page 212.

Puttenham has been complaining of a contemporary plagiarizing poet, and says: 'This man deserves to be endited of petty larceny for pilfering other men's devises from them, and converting them to his own use.' This reminds one of the answers Bacon gave to the Queen about Sir John Hayward's book; a subject entitled *Hayward's Pamphlet* that we will look into later on. Bacon had said Hayward was guilty of felony from Tacitus.

Page 217.

The oracles of Delphos are mentioned here. This is rather a gross classical blunder, or at least a great piece of carelessness, for Delphi is the correct word. The same mistake occurs in Shakespeare's *Winter's Tale* three times, and also in John Lyly's (?) *Midas*.

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<sup>11</sup> PP. 45-46.

<sup>12</sup> In the early part of Elizabeth's Reign, Stow's patrons were Archbishop Parker, Bale, Horn, Cecil, Bacon, and Dudley; and later still, such ultra-Protestants as Whitgift and Hutton.

<sup>13</sup> Lib. III.

Page 231.

Here begins a long chapter of decency in behaviour or courtesy and good manners in society. One would not expect this in a work on poetry. But if Bacon wrote the book we are considering, the matter becomes much less surprising, for Bacon's courtesy was one of his most striking and attractive qualities, as everyone will admit who has studied his life, letters and works. Bacon here and there in his writings mentions the value of this quality. It is also a distinct feature of the Shakespeare plays, which abound beyond measure in terms of courtesy. In addition, we see the original terms lying about loose in Bacon's *Promus*, which was a kind of workshop from which his materials were drawn.

Page 232.

Here are two tales about Alexander the Great, a hero in whom Bacon took much interest and often refers to. Moreover, these same tales appear together, and follow in the same order in Bodenheim's *Theatre of the Little World*, a work well to be considered to be attributed to Bacon.

Page 254.

Here we find some good and sensible remarks about gardening. This was not every man's hobby, even if he always 'dwelt in country quarters'; but Bacon, though he lived so much at Gray's Inn and about town, made a great hobby of this art, and was a decided connoisseur, as can be seen and found in his work *Sylva Sylvarum*.

It is worthwhile to notice here that the greater part of the end of Puttenham's second book <sup>14</sup> is taken up by comments on the scheme of applying classical metres and classical numerosity to modern English verse. Unexpected from an old man like Puttenham, who really belonged almost to the previous generation, whereas this discussion about classical measures was of comparatively recent date, and formed the chief topic of that *Areopagus of English Poets*, where Sidney, Spenser, Fulke Greville, Dyer, and Harvey were the leading spirits, and where young Francis Bacon was no stranger or outsider to.

Also strange in all this long discourse on English classical metres published in 1589, there is not the slightest reference to Sidney, Harvey, Immerito, Drant, or anyone connected with the Court of the English Areopagus, which was a Court especially constituted for, and chiefly engaged, in dealing with this very matter of which this long discourse treats.

We conclude our tidbit of this anonymous and most secretive work, hoping that the evidence offered above, may lean toward Francis Bacon being the author and soul creator of Puttenham's *The Arte of English Poesie*.

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<sup>14</sup> PP. 85–113.